

Linguistic Markers of Identities in Philippine Online Networking

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Article Detail:	Abstract
Received: 17 Jan 2026; Received in revised form: 18 Mar 2026; Accepted: 17 Apr 2026; Available online: 26 Apr 2026 ©2026 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Keywords— Community of Practice, Cultural Models, Philippine Online Networking, Language and Identity.	<i>The English language, traditionally viewed as monolithic and monocentric, now evolves into diverse varieties embedded in unique communities of practice. The expansion of online communication has further informed this evolution, giving rise to virtual spaces where members negotiate shared meanings, identities, and linguistic norms. This paper explores language use within an online networking business community of practice in the Philippines. Drawing on theories of Communities of Practice (COP) and Cultural Models, it examines how English is positioned in relation to the members' cultural models and how community-specific jargons function as markers of identities. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of actual online conversations and social media posts, the study reveals that group members use English and local languages in dynamic linguistic strategies, such as code-switching and translingual practices, to construct and perform their identities within the group. The findings further reveal the role of English as a tool for empowerment and a marker of identity in digital spaces, hence emphasizing the need for a more inclusive understanding of language use in contemporary online communities.</i>

I. INTRODUCTION

The English language has long been perceived as a monolithic and monocentric entity; however, this view has been challenged by the rise of pluricentric perspectives such as the World Englishes. This framework recognizes that English evolves through the complex interplay of historical, social, and cultural factors that have shaped its global trajectory, moving beyond a singular, "standard" form (Baseem, 2023) and giving rise to localized features and varieties (Canagarajah, 2013). In these contexts, meaning is negotiated dynamically through speakers' linguistic repertoires during communication.

Historically, the spread of English was primarily linked to colonization and migration. Today, however, technological advancements have enabled the emergence of virtual communities that transcend geographic boundaries. These online spaces are populated by users with diverse linguistic backgrounds, further complicating the trajectory of English language evolution. The internet facilitates translingual practices, where meaning-making occurs across and beyond traditional language boundaries, especially in online communities where English often serves as a contact language.

As Daniels (1985) argued, English remains vital and vibrant as long as it continues to be used, regardless

of whether it is “tended” or left to evolve freely. While critics of linguistic change express concern over the emergence of jargon, the decline of standard dialects, and perceived ineffectiveness in writing, others view these phenomena as signs of linguistic adaptation. Quirk (1988), for instance, warned that treating learner “errors” as features of new English varieties risks undermining the role of Standard English, especially in academic and professional contexts.

Canagarajah (2013) traced the monolingual paradigm to the Romantic Movement, which linked language to national identity and territoriality. Under this view, language was treated as a pure system embodying the spirit and values of a community, often leading to assumptions of homogeneity and the exclusion of linguistic diversity. In contrast, communities characterized by multilingualism challenge this paradigm, highlighting the social and ecological embeddedness of language practices.

In today’s globalized digital spaces, however, speakers increasingly adopt pragmatic strategies that diverge from standardized forms. Pennycook (2014) noted that while a centralized international variety of English may facilitate global communication, real-world usage reflects hybridity, adaptability, and localized innovation. These variations result from the creative and generative nature of language practice, where new forms emerge in response to social interaction and contextual needs.

The rapid diffusion of English through digital technology—particularly on social media platforms—has accelerated this trend. Online spaces allow users to establish global networks and engage in real-time interaction across linguistic and cultural boundaries. As a result, the traditional geographic model of English language spread (e.g., Kachru’s concentric circles) becomes increasingly insufficient. Instead, the focus must shift toward understanding translingual practices and identity negotiation in virtual spaces.

This paper therefore explores the linguistic features and identity constructions within a Philippine-based online networking business community. Guided by Canagarajah’s (2013) framework on communities of practice and translingualism, and Gee’s (2012) theory on cultural models and situated meanings, the study

investigates how English is positioned within the group’s discourse, how members negotiate identity through language, and how group-specific jargon functions as a marker of identity. Through interviews, observation, and analysis of Facebook group interactions, the paper sheds light on the evolving role of English in digital entrepreneurship communities in the Philippines.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach grounded in sociolinguistic inquiry to explore the linguistic features and identity markers within a Philippine-based online networking business community. The investigation was guided by Canagarajah’s (2013) concepts of translingual practice and communities of practice (CoP), and Gee’s (2012) theories of cultural models and situated meanings.

To capture authentic language use and community dynamics, data were collected through two primary methods: (1) online interviews and (2) naturalistic observation of Facebook group conversations. A smaller strand of the broader networking structure, managed by one of the “uplines,” was purposefully selected for this paper. This particular group was chosen due to the accessibility of data, the willingness of participants, and the researcher’s granted permission to observe ongoing conversations within the community.

Ten (10) members of the networking group participated in semi-structured interviews, conducted via private messaging platforms and face-to-face, depending on the participant’s preference. These participants were selected based on their active involvement in the group and their openness to sharing linguistic practices and reflections. The interviews aimed to elicit information on the members’ language use, identity, and the role of English in their business communication.

In addition to interviews, actual screenshots of Facebook posts and Messenger conversations were gathered through the cooperation of the group’s “upline”. While the group’s Facebook page is closed and accessible only to members, the researcher was granted limited access to observe internal discussions, member greetings, business updates,

and promotional posts. These online interactions provided rich textual data for analyzing jargons, identity construction, and situated language use.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and identifiable information was omitted from transcripts and excerpts.

The data was analyzed through thematic analysis, focusing on linguistic patterns, identity markers, and instances of translingual practice. Special attention was given to recurring lexical items, code-mixing patterns, culturally embedded expressions, and the ways members framed their entrepreneurial identities through language.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Profile of the Community of Practice (CoP)

The online networking community under study uses the tagline “Global business for global people,” reflecting its commitment to inclusivity and cross-border entrepreneurship. Originally a branch of a traditional marketing company, the group evolved into an independent multi-level marketing (MLM) enterprise in 2011. It offers both tangible products and digital services, including e-cash, ticketing, bills payment, and mobile loading, making it suitable for online transactions.

While the group claims inclusivity across gender, social status, educational attainment, and geographic origin, the ten members interviewed for this study shared similar characteristics. They were all college-educated millennials, aged 28–37, with professional experience outside the networking business. Though diverse in regional origin, six from Mindanao, two from Luzon, and others undisclosed, the members share common digital literacy and entrepreneurial orientation. This aligns with Myers and Sadaghiani’s (2010) description of millennials as digitally native, socially confident, and driven to assert identity in professional spaces.

Despite the group’s assertion of equality, its structure reveals a clear hierarchy between “uplines” (mentors or recruiters) and “downlines” (new recruits), evident in both terminology and social interactions. While the group’s official narrative emphasizes

empowerment and equal opportunity, the data suggest implicit social stratification based on experience, rank, and digital fluency.

3.2 Situated Identities

The CoP heavily relies on Facebook as its primary platform for communication. Two distinct modes of online interaction are utilized: private (closed group) and public postings.

Private group messages and closed-group posts are reserved for internal coordination, onboarding, emotional support, and business strategy discussions. These posts often reflect candid experiences, frustrations, and community-specific jargon. The following are excerpts Facebook posting in a closed group:

A5: Good Moreearning Partners. Please help me welcome Maam B ----- all the way from Calamba, Misamis Occidental. Totally stranger. Twag ng twag pero hindi ko napapansin. Nagpaexplain online pero hindi ko masagotsagot. Hangang sa nagkausap rin sa wakas, nagpadala ng pera thru ----. Grabe! Iba ka Maam. Scan all files here Maam B. Earn fast and income will follow po. Congratulation po. Tulungan para sa pangarap! Aja!

A6: Good more-earning!!! DOT Night TONIGHT!!! BRING YOUR GROUP!!! Kakaibang DOT Mamaya with or Speaker!!!

In contrast, public posts are primarily used to advertise products, share earnings, and present success stories. These are strategically curated to attract potential recruits by portraying members as confident, successful entrepreneurs. Below is an example of their public post:

A1: (Product being advertised)

Health is Wealth!

Balik Alindog Program

Current weight: 65kg

Start date May 19, 2017

Target date: August 28, 2017

Grabeee for your orders please pm me sa mga gustong sumabay...

A1: Grabeeeee ---- Iba ka. Parami ng parami na kami. Dating strangers lang now turned to be business partners.

This dual use of platforms illustrates what Gee (2012) describes as the negotiation of situated identities. In public spaces, members adopt performative roles such as aspiring entrepreneurs, lifestyle influencers, and motivators, while in closed spaces, they express vulnerability and navigate internal hierarchies. This fluidity exemplifies Canagarajah's (2013) notion of translingual and trans-spatial practice, where individuals shuttle across communities and adopt different linguistic and identity resources to align with contextual expectations.

3.3 Language Use, Code-Mixing, and Translingual Practices

The linguistic repertoire of the CoP includes both English and Tagalog, often blended in what Canagarajah (2013) terms translingual practice. Members naturally shift between languages and embed English content words, such as "power," "upline," "downline," "income," and "goal", into Tagalog sentences. Emoticons, excessive punctuation (e.g., repeated exclamation points), and informal spellings further enrich their multimodal communication.

Examples such as "Grabeeee power po upline" and "good moreEarning" illustrate how English terms are creatively repurposed within the community. The greeting "good moreEarning," for instance, is a deliberate portmanteau of "good morning" and "more earning," reflecting the community's emphasis on financial productivity. These creative usages are not accidental but serve as linguistic markers of group membership.

The word "power," used as an adjective or intensifier (e.g., "power speaker," "power hearing"), is another distinctive feature. While Merriam-Webster defines "power" in terms of control or influence, the CoP recontextualizes it to mean "excellent," "motivational," or "intense." According to interviews, such terms are often introduced by uplines and disseminated through internal communication, indicating top-down transmission of community jargon.

These findings support Blommaert's (2017) assertion that online spaces generate new performed and ascribed identities. Through shared language use and platform-specific conventions, the CoP creates a

semi-private linguistic world that both unites members and distinguishes them from outsiders.

3.4 Cultural Models of English and Identity Performance

Interviews revealed that members of the community share common cultural models about English. Many learned the language at home or through early exposure to media, private tutoring, or formal schooling. For them, English is not just a school subject, it is a language of opportunity, power, and success. They associate English with professionalism, education, entrepreneurship, and, most notably, global communication.

This belief aligns with Quirk's (1988) view of English as the gateway to international communication, and with Canilao's (2015) observation that English is often linked to access, prestige, and social mobility in postcolonial contexts like the Philippines. Members internalized the idea that speaking English proficiently signifies intelligence and competence, especially in professional and digital environments.

Yet, despite this reverence for "standard" English, their actual language practices reflect a hybrid orientation. The CoP does not uphold grammatical purity; instead, it values effectiveness in communication, even if it involves code-mixing or non-standard usages. This is a hallmark of translingual identity performance; members draw from their multilingual repertoires to assert themselves across various social domains.

For example, while English is used more frequently in public posts to project professionalism and credibility, members shift to a more intimate, expressive register in private posts, mixing English and Tagalog, abbreviating words, and using community-specific jargon. This reveals their ability to shuttle between Discourses (Gee, 2012) and perform multiple identities depending on the audience and communicative goal.

3.5 Situated Meanings and Community-Specific Jargon

The study further explored the notion of situated meanings, the context-bound interpretations of language based on shared experiences and group norms. As Gee (2012) asserts, the meaning of a word is shaped not only by dictionary definitions but also

by the speaker's social context and the community's shared practices.

The CoP uses several terms with localized, situated meanings that would be opaque to outsiders. For instance:

"Power" is frequently used to express admiration, motivation, or emphasis (e.g., "Power talk," "Power hearing"), not merely strength or control.

"Upline" and "downline" are MLM terms referring to hierarchical positions in the network, but in this CoP, they also imply seniority, mentorship, and authority in communication.

"Good moreEarning" serves as both a greeting and a motivational message, symbolizing the group's shared values around financial freedom and entrepreneurial ambition.

These terms function as identity markers, distinguishing members from non-members. They are repeated in posts and verbal exchanges, forming a kind of linguistic badge that reinforces solidarity. Notably, some terms are introduced by community leaders (uplines) and passed on to new recruits, illustrating that these jargons are not spontaneously emergent but often institutionalized from the top down.

Furthermore, these jargons are used strategically. In public posts, members moderate their language to appear more accessible and professional. In closed groups, however, the frequency of insider language increases. This distinction suggests a deliberate management of audience and identity, as members alternate between inclusivity and exclusivity depending on their communicative intent.

3.5 Implications for Language, Identity, and Digital Communication

The findings of this study underscore the dynamic and situated nature of language in digital communities of practice. In the context of Philippine online networking, language is not merely a tool for information exchange; it is a means of constructing identities, performing social roles, and signaling group membership.

Through their use of English, members of the CoP assert both local and global affiliations. English functions as a symbol of modernity and legitimacy, especially in business-oriented spaces. Yet, this

global language is localized through code-mixing, redefined lexicon, and contextual usage, producing what Canagarajah (2013) calls translingual practice. Members do not conform strictly to native-speaker norms. Instead, they rework the language to reflect their cultural models, lived experiences, and communicative goals.

Moreover, the group's reliance on multimodal resources, such as emojis, emphatic punctuation, stylized spellings, and catchphrases, reflects a broadened understanding of literacy in the digital age. Blommaert (2017) argues that modern literacy extends beyond textual accuracy to include visual, performative, and interactional competence across platforms. In this CoP, members skillfully navigate different semiotic modes to maximize engagement and reinforce shared values.

Another key implication lies in the porosity between public and private online spaces. Members tactically shift between modes of address depending on their audience. Public posts are curated to reflect success, unity, and opportunity, discursively constructing an appealing image for potential recruits. In contrast, private conversations reveal candid reflections, role hierarchies, and emotionally charged expressions. This duality reflects what Gee (2012) describes as Discourses, ways of being, doing, and saying that are informed by cultural models and shaped by social interaction.

The community's use of language also reveals a tension between egalitarian ideals and implicit hierarchies. While the group espouses inclusivity, digital literacy and linguistic fluency act as gatekeeping mechanisms. The propagation of insider jargon and mentor-assigned identities (e.g., "upline") contributes to stratification, suggesting that language is both empowering and regulating in digital CoPs.

Finally, the findings carry pedagogical implications. Given the widespread adoption of digital communication, there is a growing need to revisit how English is taught and evaluated in the Philippines. Rather than focusing solely on prescriptive grammar and native-speaker norms, language education may benefit from embracing the realities of hybrid usage, context-sensitive literacy, and identity-based communication, especially as

learners increasingly operate in multilingual and multimodal environments.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study explored the linguistic markers of situated identities within a Philippine-based online networking community of practice (CoP), drawing from Canagarajah's (2013) notion of translingual practice and Gee's (2012) theory of cultural models and situated meanings. Through analysis of interviews, Facebook posts, and group chat conversations, the study demonstrated how language, particularly English, functions as both a communicative tool and a symbolic resource for identity construction in digital spaces.

Despite claims of inclusivity, the CoP reflects implicit boundaries shaped by digital literacy, generational affiliation, and communicative competence. Members, mostly millennial, college-educated Filipinos, demonstrate fluid identity performances by alternating between formal, English-dominant discourse in public spaces and informal, translingual practices in closed group settings. This duality underscores how language is not only shaped by social context but also used to strategically manage impressions, assert belonging, and differentiate insiders from outsiders.

The study found that English occupies a privileged space within the community, symbolizing business legitimacy, social mobility, and global access. However, it is not used in its "standard" form. Instead, it is blended with Tagalog, recontextualized through jargon (e.g., "power," "good moreEarning"), and embedded in multimodal expressions such as emojis and emphatic punctuation. These practices constitute a rich site of translingual meaning-making that resists traditional notions of linguistic purity.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that identity in online communities is negotiated through a repertoire of linguistic, cultural, and digital resources. As members shuttle across offline and online spaces, they carry with them competing cultural models of language and adapt their discourse accordingly. These results highlight the need for a broader understanding of English language use, one that recognizes hybrid practices,

multimodal literacies, and the social functions of language in shaping community life.

The study also calls for pedagogical reflection. As digital and translingual communication becomes more integral to professional and entrepreneurial domains, English language education in the Philippines must evolve. Teachers and institutions may move beyond monolingual, prescriptive models and embrace a more contextual, practice-based approach that mirrors the communicative realities of learners and professionals in the 21st century.

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